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ABSTRACT

Heritage education is an interdisciplinary, interactive approach to examining the historical and cultural evidence of heritage that remains in neighborhoods, community, and regions. This paper seeks to answer some basic questions about heritage education, including: What is it? What are heritage educators seeking to accomplish? Is there a right way to go about it? Who is doing it? A number of heritage education programs and activities from throughout the country are discussed. Examples of heritage education practices include history discovery trunks, walks around neighborhoods, field trips to historic sites, adopt-a-building projects, community planning simulations, historical reenactments, and lessons for an integrated curriculum. Research on state and local programs and activities involving heritage education reveals some disturbing information. For example, few of the programs that have been developed have been adopted by the schools they are meant to serve. The vast majority of programs are for early elementary students and connected to local or state history units. There are few existing programs for upper elementary, middle, or high school students. The paper also discusses the "teaching with historic places" program that has been developed cooperatively by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Park Service's National Register for Historic Places. (DB)

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# Heritage Education: What's Going On Out There?

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**"Teaching with Historic Places"**
**American Historical Association**
**Annual Meeting, December 28, 1992, Washington, D.C.**

History discovery trunks, walks around the neighborhood, field trips to historic sites, adopt-a-building projects, community planning simulations, historical reenactments, and lessons for an integrated curriculum -- these are only a few of the many, many approaches to heritage education taking place throughout the united states. The fact that we think about heritage education as a methodology as much as a body of information signals some of the confusion surrounding this emerging educational arena. What is it? What are we trying to accomplish? Is there a right way to go about it? Who is doing it?

Heritage education means different things to different people and groups, depending on their professional or community orientation. As of now, people who identify themselves as heritage educators have not come together in association to adopt a single definition of the term, nor to adopt standards for themselves as practitioners. Many of them do stay in touch, however, through other professional associations and meetings. There are some common elements to the heritage education activities they have developed. First, the heritage education approach focuses the learners' attention on the actual evidence of our history and culture, such as the natural and built environment, the material culture, community practices, oral history, music and folkways, as well as written documentation. Second, the heritage education approach engages learners in an interactive exploration of this evidence to enrich their understanding of the themes, issues, events and people that are a part of our historical experiences and cultural expressions. Third, the heritage education approach encourages learners to move from idea to action, from insight into the significance of a resource to commitment to protect it.



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Perhaps the best way of thinking about heritage education is that it is an approach to teaching and learning about our history and culture that draws on many disciplines, such as history, geography, the natural and social sciences, the arts and literature to decipher the meaning and significance of all kinds of evidence about heritage remaining in neighborhoods, communities and regions. Some of this evidence is protected in musuems and at sites, but much of it is an organic part of the ongoing life of communities.

Let us look at several different ways heritage education programs and activities are occurring.

At historic house museums or historic sites, such as those owned and operated by the national trust or the national park service, there has been a concerted effort to strengthen the interpretive program so that visitors receive a more complete and accurate story about the people who lived and worked at the site, and the events that occurred there. House museums are finding creative ways to tell their story to learners of every age. Visitors can still participate in a guided tour of the site. During their visit, school children might also participate in historical reenactments in which they portray people associated with the house, or engage in role playing about issues that are relevant to the site, or join in learning activities to develop their skills in historical inquiry. At shadows on the teche in louisianna, for example, youngster portray the children of the weeks family who owned the plantation. An arlington, virginia high school class visits woodrow wilson's home in washington, d.C. Each year for a simulated league of nations meeting. Students visiting drayton hall in charleston, south carolina learn archaeological skills to discover the site's past.

History has been recreated in a number of living history museums. In some instances, such as williamsburg, virginia, structures have been restored or reconstructed on the historical site. Sturbridge village in massachusetts is a recreation of a new england community, and greenfield village has brought historic buildings, streets and other structures from a number of locations throughout the country and reconstructed them on a site near detroit, michigan. All of these living history museums offer a wide range of interactive learning opportunities that allow visitors to connect with the period and culture being presented. They share with museums and sites fixed exhibits and preserved structures and artifacts, combining these with demonstrations, reenactments, performances, and opportunities to explore historical evidence. The kinds of educational programs at house museums and living history museums can also be seen now in more traditional museum settings, such as those smithsonian institution in washington, d.C.

In neighborhoods and communities, heritage education is most often a project of a historical or folklore society, house museum or preservation group. Programs developed by historical societies tend to emphasize investigation into the community's people and events from local records. The american association of state and local

history is working with historical societies and house museums to help them initiate heritage education programs. In hunterdon county, new jersey, for example, high school students have compiled valuable documentation on residents in the county for the historical society. The kentucky historical society supports an extensive collection of books, films and other educational materials and activities for school-aged children. The foxfire program in raven gap, georgia is a good example of a folklore approach to heritage education. In the philadelphia area, cliveden house in germantown, not only teaches youngsters about events at the house itself, but is one of several historic sites teaching many aspects of local history.

When preservation organizations sponsor heritage education programs, these programs tend to invite students to get out and look around their community, discovering the landmarks and features that are cues to the community's history and culture. A staple of these kinds of programs is the walk-around-the block for early elementary students. Preservation organizations might be associated with a house museum, but more likely they associate themselves with an older area of the community that is rich in local history. The heritage education program in the savannah, georgia schools, for example, uses the historic residential district to teach youngsters about the european roots of the city's design and culture, and the exciting overlay of the american experience. In boston, massachusetts preservation consultant joyce stevens has designed history trails for students of every age on topics as far reaching as women's issues, cultural diversity, and architectural history. Preservation organizations are activist oriented and want students to develop a sense of civic responsibility for protecting the sites that reflect the community's heritage. Appreciation and stewardship are as important to the preservationist as knowledge and understanding.

The architecture in the schools program sponsored by the american institute of architecture emphasizes the importance of the design arts as an organizing principle for exploring the built environment. This program acknowledges the importance of the historical and cultural elements reflected in our homes, commercial districts, neighborhoods and countryside, but its larger purpose is to bring learners to a point where they can recognize all of the design elements that contribute to the texture of communities: aesthetics, the environment, technology, economics, and history and culture. Those using the heritage education approach from an architectural perspective emphasize "visual literacy". They want students to wake up to the design features around them, including stylistic and structural features and the use of space and materials. The center for understanding the built environment (cube) in prairie village, kansas has become a recognized leader in the architectural perspective to heritage education.

Community and environmental planners have also come to recognize the importance of educating people about those features in the natural and built environment that carry historical and cultural significance. They are not only interested in specific sites

and structures, but community building patterns that reflect the heritage and aspirations of the people who live and work there -- residential, commercial and manufacaturing areas, parks, public buildings, roadways and waterways. For these groups, heritage education is incorporated into larger environmental planning activities. The focus is on the community's future and arriving at a decision-making process that considers the common good, and the natural as well as the built environment. The american planning association is supporting a variety of educational activities that include heritage education elements. Ramona mullahey at historic hawaii foundation, for example, has developed a program for teachers and students that guides "youth and adults through a basic understanding and decision-making processs that shapes and designs our environment." The program asks learners to manipulate basic planning concepts such as zoning, growth, and managing change.

There has been a significant change during the past five years or so among heritage education practitioners. We are seeing a dramatic shift away from "doing it all ourselves and handing it to the schools" to a recognition that teachers, as managers of student learning, need to be involved in the design and development of heritage education programs. Ginny graves, director of cube recognized early on that she needed to "teach the teachers" to carry her agenda into the classroom. The fundamental principle of the national trust's national heritage education effort has been to build a partnership with the education community that linked their goals for educational reform to our goal to protect our nation's historical and cultural environments.

As a result of this change, professional development for teachers and preservationists on how to design heritage education activities that fit into the school curriculum has emerged as the predominant effort of all the groups and organizations promoting the heritage education approach. The utah heritage foundation, for example, sponsored a summer workshop for teachers in 1992 that introduced them to architecture and design as organizing concepts for exploring the salt lake city environment. Teachers were asked to examine how aesthetics, economics, science and technology, the environment, and history and culture influenced why and how salt lake city was built as it was. Utha heritage foundation will translate the workshop activities into lesson plans that teachers can use in the classroom. In charleston, south carolina, the low country school districts and drayton hall conducted a three-week summer program during which they visited all of the historical and cultural sites in the region, and then worked together on how to incorporate the information found at these sites into a number of subject areas.

There is no lack of activity in heritage education. The national trust has listed more than 600 local and state programs that roughly fit into the heritage education arena. But the data on these programs and activities reveal some disturbing information. (1) Few of these programs have been adopted by the schools there are meant to serve. They remain programs "outside" the schools that a willing teacher might choose to try.

(2) The vast majority of programs are for early elementary students, connected to local or state history units. There is little effort to continue heritage education programs for upper elementary, middle of high school students. (3) Although the listed heritage education programs indicate that they could be used in a number of subject areas, there is no evidence that the programs are actually designed with teachers as an integral part of these subject areas. (4) The programs overwhelminghly focus on architecture and the design arts, emphasizing recognition of stylistic features. Even where the material could logically be used to teach subjects included in the school curriculum, heritage educators do not seem to see the link. For example, less than one per cent of programs suggested they could be used to teach geography (an obvious link to heritage education), and few southern plantations saw their site as an opportunity to teach about cultural diversity in the united states. (5) There is virtually no evidence that these heritage education programs have been evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in improving the learners' understanding of their history and culture. Although there is an initial enthusiasm for the heritage education approach because it is lively and engaging, we don't know if it makes any difference in what students learn, or how well they learn in. This problem is compounded because heritage educators have not adopted standards for themselves and probably do not agree on some fundemental issues about what they are trying to teach: greater understanding of our history and culture, civic responsibility for historical and cultural resources, decision-making strategies for environmental planning, or all of these?

After reviewing the range of activities going on in heritage education, the national trust's heritage education program and the national park service's national register for historic places developed its cooperative program, "teaching with historic places." The program builds on the strengths of many excellent programs already in place, and it tries to address some of the gaps that seem to exist in the heritage education arena. First, the program has been designed from the perspective of the school curriculum -- what teachers are expected to teach students. We ask the question, "how can teachers make better use of the natural, historical and cultural environment to enrich students' understanding and strengthen students' skills in a number of subject areas. We do not push preservation, or planning, or some other agenda through the program. Our assumption is that if teachers and student come to recognize the signifance of places in their environment, they will begin to value these and want to protect them. Second, classroom materials have been designed to make it easy for teachers to integrate information about natural, historical and cultural resources into their regular instructional program. Short, ready-to-use lesson plans and longer curriculum units use historic places as a way to focus student learning on a topic and skills we know most teachers are expected to teach. Third, professional development activities emphasize solid academic grounding in a number of disciplines, current thinking on instructional methodology, and the need to form school-community collaborations.

The "teaching with historic places" approach should begin to yield the kind of data missing to date in heritage education programs: we hope to see more teachers (and hopefully groups of teachers, or whole schools) be the initiators of heritage education in the schools, using preservation groups, museum and site interpreters, archaeologists, architects and planners as their resource persons; we hope to see heritage education activities fully integrated into classroom instruction at all grade levels and in many subject areas; and, finally, we want to have the tools for measuring the strengths and weaknesses of the heritage education approach so we can improve our methodology.

For those of us whose primary concern is protecting our historical and cultural environment, it may feel like "teaching with historic places" is moving us so far into the education arena that we are forgetting our primary purpose -- conservation and preservation. But we know we cannot do the job by ourselves. We know that people become conservationists and preservationists when their environment takes on personal meaning -- when they are educated. And new research tells us that youngsters who develop early habits of civic responsibility will, as adults, be those who contribute most willingly to the common good.

A final word of caution. There may be another reason why it is critical that heritage educators find ways to mainstream the heritage education approach. For a long time "heritage" connoted elitism -- the history and culture of wealthy, powerful european-americans. We have worked hard to democratize the term. But we may be facing a new kind of elitism. Are we designing heritage education programs that are "out of the market" for most children and most schools. Are heritage education experiences only available for the gifted and talented, or those from wealthier school districts which can afford field trips, or classrooms and schools fortunate enough to have been adopted by a preservation organization or some other group interested in heritage education? We may be so eager to connect with those who are open to our love of historic places that we fail to consider our larger educational responsibilities as keepers of the public trust.